THE "MAIN PLANE" AS A COMPOSITIONAL ELEMENT IN THE STYLE OF THE MACEDONIAN RENAISSANCE AND ITS ORIGINS

Bezalel Narkiss

This article, dedicated to the master of stylistic analysis, Ernst Kitzinger, deals with the style of composition in landscape painting in Byzantine illumination.

I was never a formal student of Ernst Kitzinger's. When I came to study art history in London in 1958 under Hugo Buchthal and the late Francis Wormald, he was already at Harvard. But his insight into the intricate problems of art historical methods and his clear analysis of style has fascinated me ever since, especially after meeting him in 1968 at Dumbarton Oaks and coming to know both him and his wife, Susan, as friends.

I became interested in compositional style many years ago and have had many chances to discuss it with colleagues and students alike. The first version of this article was read ten years ago at the Byzantine Congress in Athens. Since then, my insight has deepened and the scope of my studies of style has broadened to include more areas and artistic schools.[1] However, the conceptual problem of composition started to intrigue me while dealing with the Macedonian Renaissance, and thus I should like to offer this firstborn in appreciation and friendship to Ernst Kitzinger.

A very small, toylike building at the feet of the repentant David in the top register of a miniature

in the famous Gregory of Nazianzus Homilies in Paris has long been a puzzle to me (Fig. 1). The right-hand section depicts David prostrating himself in front of Nathan, who is standing on the right, with an angel behind David to the left. Bathsheba, who is peering out from under a canopy behind David's throne, is the same size as the other three figures. The toylike building is placed between David and Nathan. The neutral background does not indicate an actual space, and thus gives no depth to the picture. If this tiny edifice had been placed somewhere in the top part of the panel, in line with an imaginary horizon, no problem would have arisen because each of these groups could have been taken as occupying a different plane in the picture: all four figures and the throne in the foreground, with the building in the farthest background plane.

Describing this panel, Henri Omont[2] suggested that the small building was a symbolic representation of Rabbah, the capital of the Ammonites, where Uriah, Bathsheba's husband, was killed (1 Sam. 12). Iconographically, it may indeed be the city of Rabbah; this does not, however, explain the unconventional place of the edifice in the composition. This is, in fact, not the only panel in the Paris Gregory where such a tiny building appears

[1] An abstract of my lecture, "Some Compositional Aspects of the Carolingian Ada Group," was published in the *International Congress of Art History* (Bologna, 1983), 76–79. This topic will possibly develop into a book, and I would, therefore, greatly appreciate any comments on this paper.

[2] Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, gr. 510, fol. 143v. See H. A. Omont, *Fac-simile des miniatures des plus anciens manuscrits grecs de la Bibliothèque Nationale du VI au XI siècles* (Paris, 1902), 21, pl. XXXIII. This tiny house is different from the "symbolical" walled cities depicted elsewhere in Byzantine and late antique art, but the scope of this article does not allow me to deal with them. C. R. Morey in his "Notes on East Christian Miniatures," *ArtB* 11 (1929), 5–103, notes the minute size of this building. He states that "the architecture of the background has been brought 'down stage', and so diminished in scale, with *characteristic Asiatic indifference* to such considerations, as not to interfere with the action and significance of the figures" (p. 36).

oddly at the bottom of the composition, and with no apparent meaning. A cluster of small classical buildings at the bottom of the panel of Ezekiel's vision of the dry bones (chap. 37) also has no obvious explanation for its place in the panel or its iconographic meaning (Fig. 2).[3]

Other illuminated manuscripts of the so-called Macedonian Renaissance have similar unconventionally small buildings in odd places. A row of undersized buildings placed in the lower part of the Job panel in the Leo Bible may serve as an arbitrary allusion to the former or future riches of Job, but it is, in any case, in a strange place in the composition (Fig. 3).[4] Besides this anomaly, the rest of the composition of the Job panel seems to correspond to our conventional expectations of a landscape composition. Job, naked and speckled with boils, is seated among the ashes (Job 2:8), with his wife standing behind offering him bread, while his three friends stand in front of him (Job 2:11), with a group of soldiers diminishing in size behind them. These three or four episodes are depicted in a single compositional space, and because of the similar size of all the figures, they form the plane of the composition closest to the outside viewer. The close background, depicted on a continuous surface at the top of the scene, comprises a mountain ridge in the center and a large building behind it to the right, forming the second plane. An additional small building to the right of the large building forms the third and farthest plane, and adds to the feeling of a homogeneous landscape. Here too, if the lower row of small buildings had been placed in the top part of the picture, on a hilltop, as the farthest plane, the painting would have seemed perfectly natural to our Italian Renaissance-trained eyes. Since they are not, we should try to understand them as a phenomenon.

These tiny buildings placed in the lower part of the landscape composition in the two above-mentioned manuscripts of the Macedonian Renaissance were not painted there haphazardly. They reveal, as will be shown, a compositional method, different from the well-known Italian Renaissance "scientific" arrangement of planes in a composition. In order to establish the method of composi-

tion of the Macedonian Renaissance and to find its origins, it may be helpful to formulate the main rules related to landscape composition in High Renaissance paintings.[5] For reasons of simplicity, and in order to avoid dealing with the mathematical theories of perspective of Brunelleschi[6] or Leonardo,[7] I will limit myself to the practical suggestions of Alberti[8] and to one example of a painting by the Venetian Giovanni Bellini.[9]

Bellini's picture of St. Francis in Ecstasy, at the Frick Collection in New York, (Fig. 4)[10] should be viewed, according to Alberti's instructions,[11] from a single fixed point of view in front of the picture, as though looking through a framed window into the distance, at the height of the main protagonist's head, thereby drawing imaginary diagonal and parallel lines which create the picture planes of depth of the landscape by determining the sizes of measurable objects in each plane. In the lower right side of the picture the large figure of St. Francis is standing in front of his cave displaying the stigmata. This area is the foreground, the first plane, and includes the high rocks to the right, the rocky ground, and the tree on the left. Above the rocky ground, to the left in a second plane are a donkey and a heron in a meadow, smaller in scale. A shepherd with his flock, measurably smaller still,

[5] The Italians who formulated the rules are Filippo Brunelleschi, whose work is lost, and Leone Battista Alberti, whose practical suggestions are found in his *De pictura*, written in Latin in Florence in 1435. I have used the Latin edition and translation by Cecil Grayson (London, 1972). For further discussions, see E. Panofsky, "Die Perspective als symbolische Form," *Vorträge der Bibliothek Warburg* (1924–25), 285–330, mainly 283–87; M. Bunim Schild, *Mediaeval Painting and the Forerunners of Perspective* (New York, 1940); J. White, "Development of Renaissance Perspective," *JWarb* 12 (1949), 58–79; idem, *The Birth and Rebirth of Pictorial Space* (London, 1957); E. Gombrich, "Renaissance Artistic Theory and the Development of Landscape Painting," in *Essays in Honor of Hans Tietze* (Paris, 1958), 117–42; E. Panofsky, *Renaissance and Renascences in Western Art* (Stockholm, 1960), esp. 123–27; E. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion*, 4th ed. (London, 1972), esp. 205–7, 237, 253–59; G. Pochat, *Figur und Landschaft* (Berlin-New York, 1973), 257–81, 341–63.

[6] Panofsky, *Renaissance*, 123–24.

[7] E. Panofsky, *The Codex Huygens and Leonardo da Vinci's Art Theories*, Studies of the Warburg Institute 13 (1940), 93 ff; White, *Development*, 70 ff; Panofsky, *Renaissance*, 123.

[8] *De pictura*, Book I; cf. Grayson, 37–59.

[9] Since he is one of the most important landscape painters in 15-century Italy, it is not necessary for me to deal with his Italian predecessors, such as Piero della Francesca or Antonello da Messina, or with the Flemish landscape painters, such as the Van Eycks, in the Ghent Altar.

[10] G. Robertson, *Giovanni Bellini* (Oxford, 1963), 76–77, pl. LVII; Pochat, *Figur und Landschaft*, 351–53. For an iconographic interpretation, see J. V. Fleming, *From Bonaventure to Bellini* (Princeton, 1982); I should like to thank Fernando Molina-Alcalde for this reference.

[11] *De pictura*, I, 19–24; cf. Grayson, 55–59.

[3] Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, gr. 510, fol. 438v. Many such buildings appear in the manuscript. Obvious examples are on fols. 332v and 367v.

[4] Vatican Library, Cod. Reg. Gr. 1, fol. 461v. See *Collezione Paleografica Vaticana*, I, *Miniature della Bibbia Cod. Vatic. Regin. Grec. 1, e del Salterio Cod. Vat. Palat. Gr. 381* (Milan, 1905), 13, pl. 17.

are in the third plane above the donkey, on the far edge of a meadow. The fourth plane starts with a river and a bridge at the foot of a hill which has a walled city on its slope and is crowned by a castle. Other diminishing hills form further deeper planes, up to the bluish mountains and the cloudy sky high in the picture, acting as the farthest plane. All these diminishing planes are distinguishable not only because they are placed one above the other and overlap each other, but also because they have figures and buildings which are measurable to the viewer's eye. The composition of such a picture comprises several planes each of which possesses its own depth by following some of these rules:[12]

1. A single plane is created by placing images, figures, or objects on a continuous surface, relatively similar in size.

2. The larger the image in the picture, the closer it is to the viewer.

3. A closer object or figure may overlap farther objects.

To these three main rules further observations can be added:

a. From the viewpoint of the observer, the planes are arranged in geometrical perspective, with diagonal lines from the objects converging into a single vanishing point. The illusion of depth is enhanced by the foreshortening of figures.

b. Further depth in a picture is achieved by placing one plane above the other, adhering to the rules mentioned above. Thus, the lowest plane will be the closest to the viewer and will, therefore, have the largest images, and it will overlap a farther plane. The planes recede in geometrical perspective as they are viewed from one point.

c. One way of creating the illusion of a rapid leap into depth is by painting much smaller images in a farther plane, while the closer plane overlaps an unseen and imaginary measurable "dead area" such as a gully or valley. Large even surfaces, such as water or meadows, can be measurably stretched in our eyes, and can, therefore, act as a means of creating infinite depth when a much smaller object is placed on the farther shore.

The scientific rules of the High Renaissance seem so natural to us that we consider any digression from these conventions to be the result of

primitiveness, ignorance, or a misunderstanding. This judgment does not take into account the fact that the scientific rules of the Italian Renaissance did not exist in the Middle Ages. Medieval artists devised different conceptual methods of creating depth in a two-dimensional picture plane. If, however, some aspects of Renaissance perspective appear in the Macedonian pictures of Job in the Leo Bible and the Ezekiel vision of the Paris Gregory, they may derive from an earlier concept used by different schools. Using Italian Renaissance terminology, let us now try to understand the composition of the Ezekiel panel in the Paris Gregory. Doing this may help to make it clear that it is not just tiny, misplaced buildings we are dealing with in the Macedonian Renaissance, but a different method of forming compositional planes.

At first glance, the miniature seems to be a unified landscape on a continuous surface, completed by mountains with trees at top right and left, and some small edifices at the bottom of the panel, which is framed by an oval garland. However, Ezekiel appears twice, thereby suggesting that it is not a unified picture. He is seen once on the right, being led by an angel who shows him the dry bones scattered in the valley that lies in front of them. He is then seen again at the top of the panel, praying toward the hand of God, while below him the bones seem to have been miraculously converted into a crowd of naked people (now very much effaced). The combination of three episodes into one composition is quite common in pre- and post-iconoclastic Byzantine illumination, unlike the usual single episodic pictures of the Italian Renaissance.[13] Indeed, the multiple episodic picture of continuous narrative creates compositional problems regarding the placement of each episode. It would seem that the multiple episodic picture is the result of several consecutive scenes being combined at some point into a single picture. Because of its continuous surface, this picture may appear, at first glance, like a unified landscape composition rather than a collage, but the sizes of the images do not support such an interpretation. Taking the planes in the order of the size of the figures, the large angel and Ezekiel may be on the first plane observing the small bones in the valley, in a far plane. But Ezekiel standing, praying in the valley, placed in the top part of the panel, is three-quarters the size of the observing Ezekiel, and may

[12] For another formulation of Renaissance rules, see White, *Development,* 58–59.

[13] K. Weitzmann, *Illustrations in Roll and Codex* (Princeton, 1947), esp. 17–33, 193–99.

be in the second plane. The small resurrected people are undoubtedly on the third plane, together with the dry bones, while the mountains and the tiny building are in the fourth plane.

Jumping from a plane in one part of the picture to another, in spite of the obvious continuous surface, constitutes an advantage over the strict rigidity of the High Renaissance rules. It creates movement in the composition which relates mainly to the size of the images and the iconographic sequence, and not to the scientific conventions of the Italian Renaissance. If Ezekiel with the Angel are the main protagonists of the composition and stand in the first plane, we may rather call it the "main plane," from the point of view of the main scene, and see the other planes as subordinate to it. Calling it the main plane will also help distinguish it from the conventional Italian Renaissance first plane, which may imply that it is not only larger, but also lowest in the composition, and that nothing overlaps it. The only criterion that foreshadows the not-yet-existing Italian Renaissance method is the distinction between large and small, which is, in Byzantine manuscripts, also an iconographic concept of evaluation rather than a formal stylistic element. It is the placement of the different scenes, figures, and objects within the composition, surrounding the main plane, that is a stylistic choice, left to the discretion of the Macedonian artist. What criteria determine the artist's choice, and where should the viewer stand in order to observe a composition of this kind?

Another panel from another manuscript of this school may help to clarify these two crucial questions. The story of Jonah in the Paris Psalter depicts four episodes in one unified compositional scheme (Fig. 5).[14] At first glance, the panel seems to be a single homogeneous landscape composition, painted on a continuous surface. But, seen in detail, it is found to comprise the same elements as in the two previous manuscripts. Following the story chronologically, one should start from the bottom left-hand corner where Jonah is being thrown out of a small boat into the jaws of a monstrous fish. From there the story moves to the bottom right, where a somewhat larger Jonah emerges from the fish's mouth; and then to the upper left, where he stands preaching to the Ninevites at the gate of their town. In the last episode,

at the upper right, Jonah is the largest, standing in prayer before the hand of God issuing from heaven.

It is obvious that this composition was constructed by conflating four scenes into a single picture, and it is likewise obvious that by creating this collage the artist could choose the position of each episode as well as its size. This choice was by no means made at random. Being a picture prefacing the text of Jonah's prayer to God, at the end of the Psalter, the praying Jonah was regarded as most important by the artist, and he therefore painted him largest in this scene.[15] He depicted all the other scenes in relation to the praying Jonah, but placed them round this main figure in the reverse of what an Italian Renaissance artist would have done. The smallest scene was placed at the bottom of the picture panel, possibly because it shows Jonah in his sinful state of defying God's command and being punished for it. After Jonah's first prayer in the belly of the fish, he emerges, promoted to a larger image, almost as big as Jonah the preacher, but not as large as the praying Jonah. The sizes of the different episodes may, therefore, be explained by the importance of Jonah's deeds, and their positioning corresponds to this.

An interim solution can be established with some certainty: the different planes are observed from above, as though the viewer is identified with the main protagonist and is seeing the picture from the latter's standpoint in the main plane. If the praying Jonah is on the main plane, the preaching Jonah is on the second plane in relation to the former. This holds good if we consider only the sizes and disregard the fact that these episodes are placed within a continuous landscape, as opposed to the Italian Renaissance method. Therefore, Jonah emerging from the fish will be on the third plane, while Jonah being thrown overboard will be on the farthest plane, despite the same continuous surface of the sea and its position in the lower part of the miniature.

In order to elucidate better the viewer's place in relation to the picture planes, I should like at this point to introduce an example from the Vienna

[14] Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, gr. 139, fol. 431v. See H. Buchthal, _The Paris Psalter_ (London, 1938), 40–42.
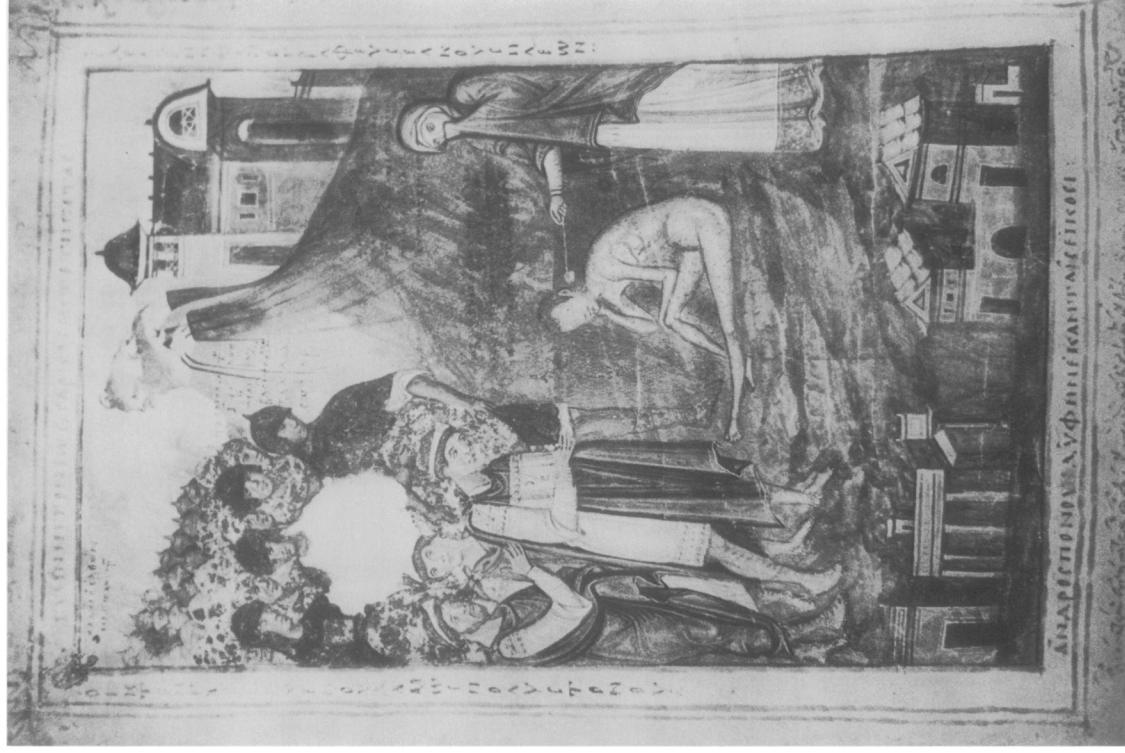
[15] The iconographic reasons for this depiction were discussed extensively by K. Weitzmann, "The Ode Pictures of the Aristocratic Psalter Recension," _DOP_ 30 (1976), 65–84, and Buchthal, _Paris Psalter_, 41. For further discussion of the iconography of Jonah, see B. Narkiss, "The Sign of Jonah," _Gesta_ 18/1 (1979), 63–76; and E. Kitzinger, "The Cleveland Marbles," _Atti del IX Congresso Internazionale di Archeologia Cristiana_ (Rome, 1978), 653–75.

1.   David Repenting and other scenes in a miniature from the Paris Gregory. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale,
     gr. 510, fol. 143v. Constantinople, 880–886 (after Omont, *Fac-simile des miniatures,* pl. xxxiii)

3. Job with His Wife and Friends, a miniature from the Leo Bible. Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Cod. Reg. Gr. 1, fol. 461v. Constantinople, tenth century (after *Collezione Palaeografica Vaticana*, I, pl. 17)
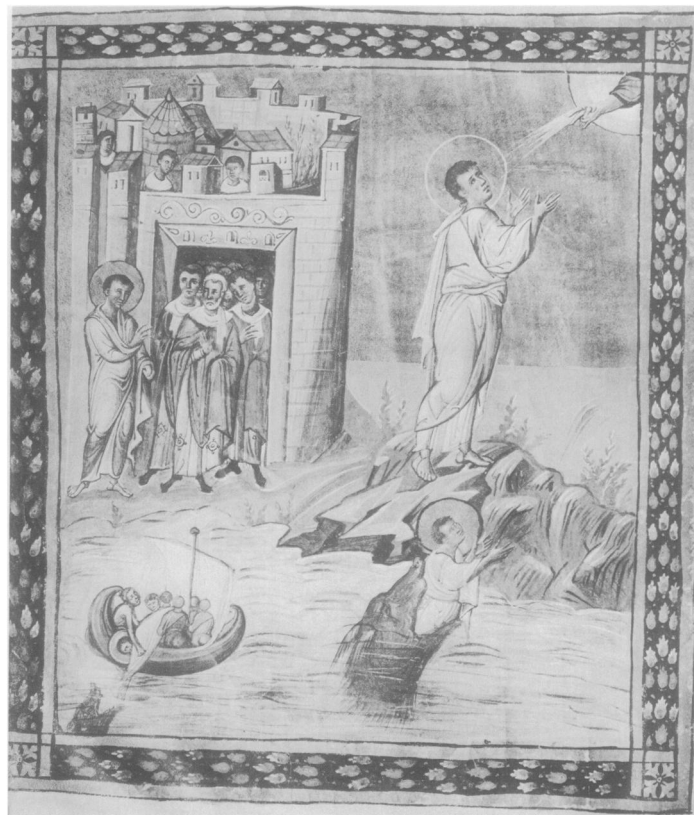

2. Ezekiel's Vision of the Dry Bones, a miniature from the Paris Gregory. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, gr. 510, fol. 438v. Constantinople, 880–886 (after Omont, pl. LVIII)

4. Giovanni Bellini, St. Francis in Ecstasy. New York, Frick Collection (photo: Frick Collection)

5. The Story of Jonah, a miniature from the Paris Psalter. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, gr. 139, fol. 431v. Constantinople, tenth century (after Omont, pl. XII)

6. Jacob Asking Permission to Take Benjamin to Egypt, a miniature from the Vienna Genesis. Vienna, Nationalbibliothek, Cod. Theol. Gr. 31, fol. 20v. Constantinople, sixth century (after von Hartel and Wickhoff, *Die Wiener Genesis* [Vienna, 1895], pl. XL)

7. Joseph Interpreting Pharaoh's Dreams, a miniature from the Vienna Genesis. Vienna, Nationalbibliothek, Cod. Theol. Gr. 31, fol. 18r. Constantinople, sixth century (after von Hartel and Wickhoff, pl. XXXV)
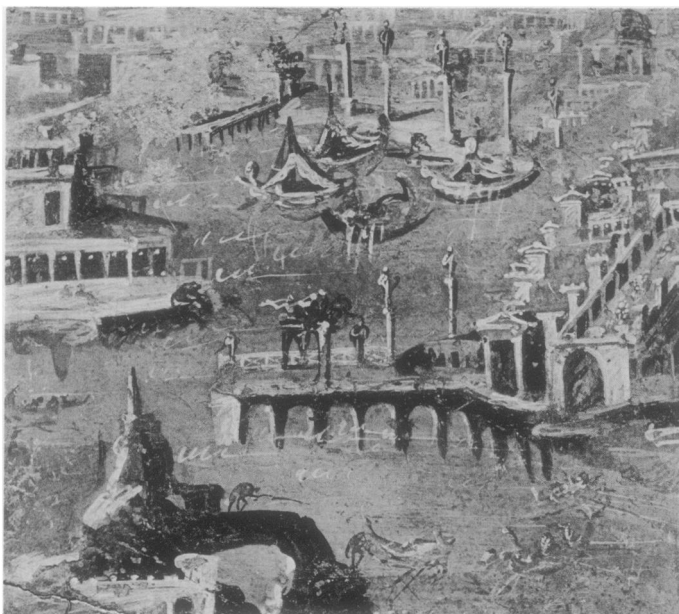
8. A Harbor Scene, wall painting from Stabiae · Naples, Museo Nazionale· (after Maiuri, *Roman Painting*, p. 123)
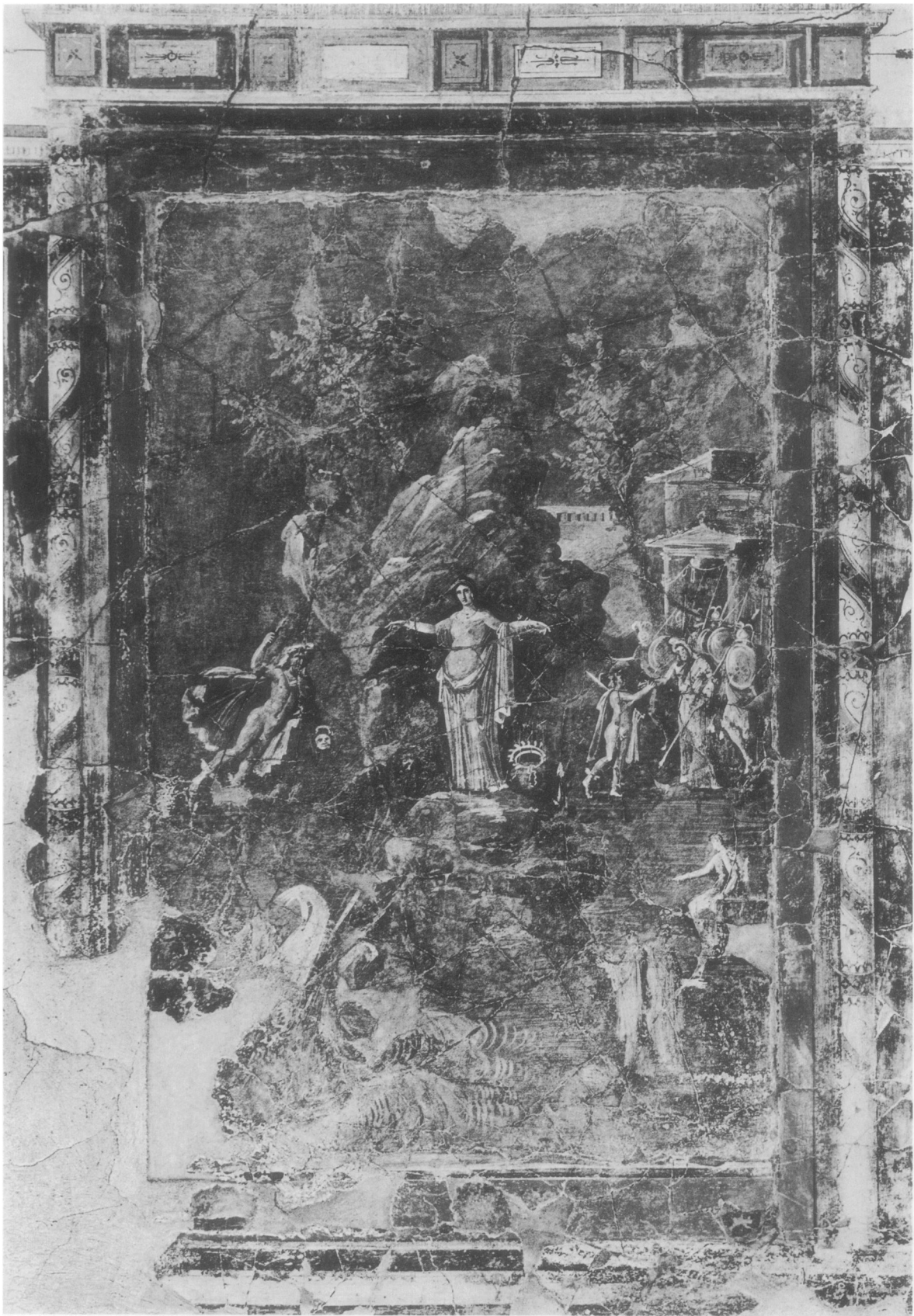
9. Perseus Saving Andromeda, a wall painting from the house of Sacerdos Amandus. Pompeii, I. 7, 7: triclinium A, west wall (after Maiuri, *Le pitture delle Case . . . del Sacerdos Amandus,* pl. B)

10. Moses in the Battle of the Amalekites, a panel in the wall mosaics of S. Maria Maggiore, Rome, ca. 450 (after Wilpert, *Die römischen Mosaiken*, III, pl. 20)

11. Joshua and the Spies from Jericho, panel in the wall mosaics of S. Maria Maggiore, Rome, ca. 450 (after Wilpert, pl. 24)
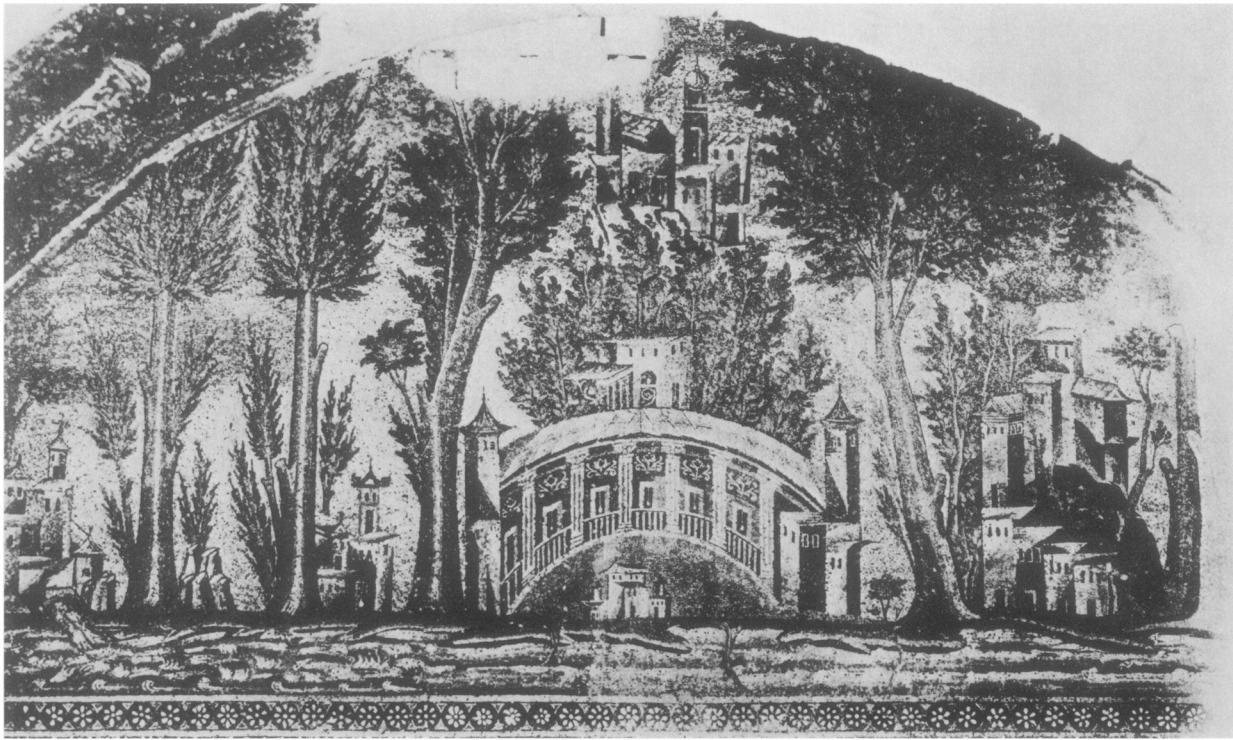
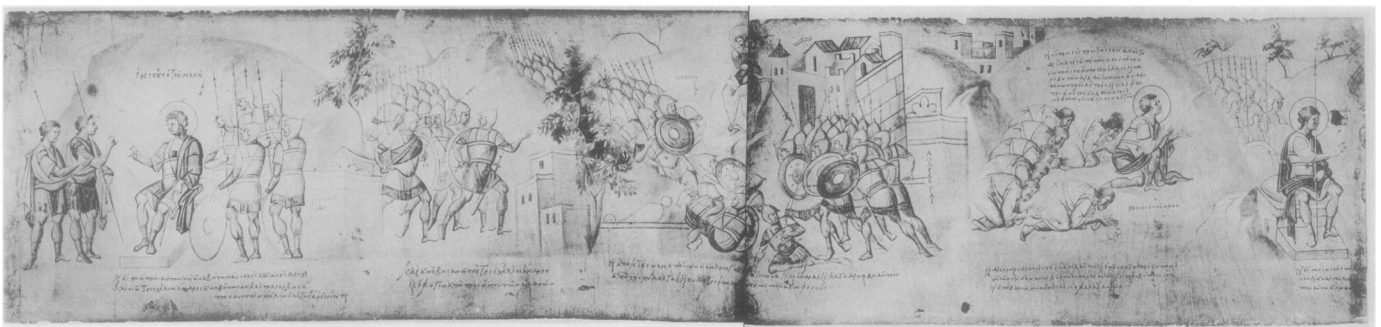12. Landscape, part of the large panoramic scene on the west wall of the portico of the Great Mosque at Damascus, ca. 715 (after Creswell, *Early Muslim Architecture,* I, pl. 55c)

13. Joshua and the Spies of Ai, Israelites Go to Battle, Israelites Defeated in Ai, Joshua and the Elders Plead to God, Joshua Judging Achan, miniatures from the Joshua Roll. Vatican Library, Pal. Gr. 431, sheets VII–VIII. Constantinople, tenth century (after *Codices e Vaticani selecti,* V [Milan, 1905], pls. VII, VIII)

Genesis, a sixth-century manuscript[16] that miraculously survived throughout the iconoclastic controversy. It will enable us to understand the method of compositional style during the pre-iconoclastic period and its relation to the post-iconoclastic Macedonian Renaissance. Since it is not possible in this short paper to analyze the entire compositional style of the Vienna Genesis, I should like to touch only on those elements discussed so far, namely, the relations between the planes, the protagonists, and the viewer. Taking first the relations between the planes, in the picture of Joseph's brethren pleading with Jacob for permission to take Benjamin to Egypt, there is a tiny house near the foot of the last brother on the left (Fig. 6).[17] Here, too, the panel conveys the feeling of a naturalistic homogeneous landscape. The first plane, containing all the figures, is blocked by a background wall with a gate. The second plane occupies the entire left-hand side of the panel, where a tall peristyle and the tiny building are the main elements of the landscape. If the tiny house had been placed on the horizon above the peristyle, it would not have looked odd to us, since it would have constituted the third, farthest plane. It thus transpires that placing the farthest plane at the bottom of the panel, overlapping the second plane, instead of vice versa, was already practiced by pre-iconoclastic artists. The position of the tiny house in this composition looks more natural in comparison with the small house in the Penitence of David panel of the Paris Gregory (Fig. 1). This is mainly due to its location within the landscape, on the side of the main plane, similar to the buildings in the Ezekiel miniature, and not on a neutral background interrupting the main plane, as in the David scene. However, the compositional method of locating planes is identical in both pictures.

Other more complex panels in the Vienna Genesis may provide further understanding of the main plane method of composition, and the relationship between the protagonists and the viewer. Joseph interpreting Pharaoh's dreams is a good example (Fig. 7).[18] The four scenes in the panel are depicted in two distinct sections (Gen. 14). In the upper left-hand section Pharaoh is asleep under a canopy with a dozing attendant seated at his side.

His dreams—of the cows swallowing each other and of the abnormally large ears of corn swallowed by the small ones—are depicted below, next to each other. In this case the relative sizes should not be considered, in view of the subject matter of the dreams. On the right is the enthroned Pharaoh talking to Joseph. Two armed attendants flank Pharaoh while his counselors stand below. A wall serves as the background to Pharaoh, and there is another small tower on the extreme right. The complex picture is a collage of scenes as well as of compositional planes, although all are depicted on one continuous surface. In order to understand the composition, the two sections of the panel should be regarded separately, in spite of the feeling of a single picture. On the left, the sleeping Pharaoh and his attendant are in the main plane, while the ears of corn, which are large because of the iconography, and the cows are undoubtedly in the second plane, although they are placed in the lower part of the composition.

The right-hand section of the panel is perhaps more revealing from the compositional point of view. Pharaoh conversing with Joseph and his attendants are in the main plane, Pharaoh's counselors at the bottom are in the second plane, while the tower in the lower right-hand corner is in the third and farthest plane. This section is seen from the internal point of view of the two protagonists—Pharaoh and Joseph—who face the outside viewer. This internal viewpoint is stressed by the fact that the counselors are seen with their backs to the external viewer, facing the protagonists.

This is a good example with which to elucidate the concept behind the technical method of positioning the planes in a miniature in these Byzantine illuminations, both pre- and post-iconoclastic. Instead of being viewed from the outside, from a single static viewing point, as in the Italian Renaissance, these paintings are seen from an internal point of view, which relates to the main iconographic protagonists. The viewer is therefore placed both inside and outside the picture. The protagonists are depicted larger in size and are placed in the top or central part of the panel. All other planes are subordinate, placed around the "main plane," and can be distinguished by the varying scales of size, according to their importance. However, since the painted miniature is two-dimensional, each of the different planes, and at times each object, is seen by the outside viewer from another point of view: the tiny tower in the Vienna Genesis painting has its own geometrical

[16] Vienna, Nationalbibliothek, Cod. Theol. Gr. 31. See O. Mazal, *Kommentar zur Wiener Genesis* (Frankfurt a. Main, 1980). For discussion on the composition of the manuscript see esp. pp. 167–73, with the earlier literature on the manuscript.
[17] Vienna, Nationalbibliothek, Cod. Theol. Gr. 31, fol. 20v.
[18] Ibid., fol. 18r.

perspective, Pharaoh's bed and canopy have a different perspective, and his footstool has a third viewing point. The foreshortening of the sleeping attendant on the left differs completely from the rest of the major images and from that of the counselors. The internal and external viewing points of these pictures, the "main plane concept," was not invented by the Byzantine artists.

The conceptual origin of these Byzantine compositional methods is ultimately to be found in Roman paintings, which may have reached Byzantium through Early Christian prototypes. Some of the landscapes, mainly those in the so-called Third Style of the Romano-Campanian wall paintings, reveal similar elements, and can probably be considered as one source of this compositional method. Many marine and harbor scenes depict buildings, boats, and figures in the lower part of the composition that are much smaller than those on the top (Fig. 8).[19] The harborscapes are matched by some narrative scenes, such as the frieze of Odyssean landscapes in the Vatican Museum.[20] Peter von Blanckenhagen, who studied the compositional aspects of the Third Style bucolic landscape paintings, sees them as an innovation by Roman artists in relation to the earlier Hellenistic tradition of the Odyssean Frieze.[21] However, he

does not reach any conclusions as to the concept behind this method, apart from stating that these landscapes are seen from above and not as if through a window. "The painter makes it clear that he does not pretend to render the realistic image of an actual landscape."[22] Studying the mythological narrative landscapes, von Blanckenhagen reaches the same conclusions, namely, that they "represent a significant achievement by blending long-established pictorial motives into a novel composition."[23] He describes and stresses the large size of the protagonists in the mythological scenes of Boscotrecase. Polyphemus and Andromeda are placed in the center of their respective landscape compositions, much larger than the other measurable figures that surround them. In a further study on Daedalus and Icarus in Pompeian paintings, von Blanckenhagen proved the innovation of the Third Style Roman landscape paintings to be mainly compositional, though he also dealt with the innovations in iconography, placing and program, lighting and color.[24]

Agreeing with Peter von Blanckenhagen, I should like to elucidate the compositional "main plane concept," seen in these pictures as formal landscapes. The example I have chosen is the wall painting of Andromeda and Perseus in the House of the Priest Amandus in Pompeii (Fig. 9).[25] It consists of four scenes: (a) Andromeda (in the center) tied to the rock, about to be devoured by an immense dragon (lower left); (b) Perseus flying in (from the left), holding the Medusa's head and a sword, falls in love with Andromeda; (c) the astonished nymphs (lower right) point to the dragon, apparently turned into stone; and (d) Perseus (center right) asking Andromeda's father for her hand.

The sizes of the scenes differ and do not conform to the Italian Renaissance rules. Andromeda and the flying Perseus (although he is somewhat smaller) are the main protagonists, and occupy the main plane in the center of the picture. All the rest

[19] For examples of harbor scenes see C. L. Ragghianti, *Pittori di Pompei* (Milan, 1963), figs. 67, 82, 83–85; W. J. T. Peters, *Landscape in Romano-Campanian Mural Painting* (Assen, 1963), figs. 94–101. Bucolic landscapes, mainly of sacro-idyllic scenes, also reveal similar methods. For example, one of the earliest is in the Red Room of the Villa of Agrippa Postumus, near Boscotrecase, now in Naples, Museo Nazionale, No. MN 147503; see P. H. von Blanckenhagen and Christine Alexander, *The Paintings from Boscotrecase*, RM 6. Ergänzungsheft (Heidelberg, 1962), 18–37, esp. that on the east wall, pls. 35–37. One should note the large size of the priestess in comparison to the shepherd who leans on the same pedestal, as well as the other elements. Other landscapes from Pompeii as well as from Rome possess the same elements, such as the Yellow Frieze of the Casa di Livia, from the Villa Farnesina and the Villa Albani, all in Rome; see Peters, *Landscape*, figs. 26–32, 43–46. See also K. Schefold, "Origin of Roman Landscape Painting," *ArtB* 42 (1960), 88–96; and idem, *Vergessenes Pompeji* (Munich, 1963), 59–72.

[20] From the house on Via Graziosa in Rome dated between 50–30 B.C. See Peters, *Landscape*, 17–32, 65–67, figs. 16–21, and all the previous literature, note 127. Also, P. H. von Blanckenhagen, "The Odyssey Frieze," *RM* 70 (1963), 100–146.

[21] Von Blanckenhagen, *Boscotrecase*, 30–35. Some quotations may stress how accurately he sees the composition. "As already noted, foreground and background scenes have no representational connections with each other. The given view does not lead the eye gradually into farther and farther distances" (p. 31). "The painter furthermore de-emphasized realism through the proportions of the figures. The priestess is much taller than the two shepherd travelers; consequently we have two equally valid disparate scales: the one set by the priestess, the other by the two men. It is quite an achievement that all these inconsist-

encies are but vaguely noticed, and that they are not at all disquieting" (p. 34).

[22] Ibid., 31.

[23] Ibid., 46.

[24] P. H. von Blanckenhagen, "Daedalus and Icarus on Pompeian Walls," *RM* 75 (1968), 106–43.

[25] A. Maiuri, *Le pitture delle case di M. Fabius Amandio, del Sacerdos Amandus e di P. Cornelius Teges* (Rome, 1938), pl. 2; Ragghianti, *Pittori di Pompei*, 75–76, fig. 52; Peters, *Landscape*, 92–93, fig. 77, and note 341 with previous literature. For a very similar composition, see von Blanckenhagen, *Boscotrecase*, 43–46, pls. 44–46; idem, "Daedalus," 133, pl. 42; Kyle M. Phillips, Jr., "Perseus and Andromeda," *AJA* 72 (1968), 1–23, pls. 1–20.

of the scenes are secondary, surrounding the main plane, although the dragon, which is very large because of the story, may also belong to this plane. Perseus in the Palace of Cepheus, to the right, is in the second plane; while the smaller nymphs, and possibly the dragon, are in the third plane. The horizon and the sky are in the farthest plane. The viewer is united with the protagonist, Andromeda, in the main plane in the center, seeing all the other scenes from her point of view. The eyes of Andromeda and of the viewer jump from the dragon to the flying Perseus, from the astonished nymphs to the palace of Cepheus. The movement in the composition is also an innovation compared with what we know of the static single-scene paintings of Greco-Hellenistic paintings. Italian Renaissance paintings, seen from a single point of view outside the composition, do not place the viewer inside the picture.

Other mythological landscapes with the same compositional method exist. The paintings of Polyphemus and Galatea from Boscotrecase and of Daedalus and Icarus have already been mentioned. The Fall of Icarus from the same House of the Priest Amandus is especially enlightening, since it also comprises several scenes.[26] Daedalus, placed in the center of the composition, with large wings outspread (where there is now a hole in the plaster), is in the main plane, surrounded by all the other planes. Below him to the left are the two Actae near a column in the second plane. One of the two women points to the falling Icarus high in the sky, who is also in the second plane, being the same size as the Actae. The fallen Icarus on the seashore below and the fisherman are in the third plane. Helios riding his quadriga in the upper left corner is in the fourth plane, while the people in their boats are in the fifth. The walled city at center right is in the farthest plane, as seen from Daedalus' viewing point, a "bird's-eye view."

This Daedalus painting is probably the best for demonstrating how the artists of the Roman mythological landscapes used the main plane method. It is structured so that all the secondary planes are seen from the point of view of the large protagonist; not only those in the lower part of the picture, but also those above him in its upper part. This

composition is, therefore, not merely a picture seen from above, from a bird's-eye view, as many other Roman landscape paintings are.[27] It is more than that: a landscape observed from within, from the protagonist's main plane, with all the other planes around it.

There was, therefore, a method of creating a landscape composition at the beginning of the first century A.D., but was this done consciously? And was there a theory behind it at the time? There are not many occasions in art history when a theory or a stylistic concept can be documented or even corroborated by texts. However, in this case we may have two early texts that relate to the way artists observed planes in a composition according to size. One is Euclid's Eighth Theorem, which confirms that it is not the distance that makes images larger or smaller, but the angle of viewing them; and this may have influenced the way artists painted. As Erwin Panofsky phrased it: "Classical optics, then, considered our sphere of vision quite literally as a 'sphere'—an assumption, incidentally, which more nearly agrees with physiological and psychological reality than that which underlies Brunelleschi's rectilinear construction."[28] This idea does not mean that Greek or Roman artists had to study Euclid's optical theories in order to know how to paint a landscape composition: they apparently did not, but the idea of the "vision in a sphere" may have been in the air, until it caught the fancy of some artists of the Pompeian Third Style, who put it into practice in their landscape paintings.

A second text related to seeing the picture in the round came back to me as I stumbled over a passage in Erwin Panofsky's *Renaissance and Renaissances*. It relates to the *Eikones* of Philostratus Lemnius, who at the beginning of the third century described in detail pictures that he saw in a collection in Naples. Describing a group of soldiers receding in depth, he says that "it is necessary to deceive the eyes, which move back in unison with the

[26] For the question of multiepisodic composition, see C. M. Dawson, *Romano-Campanian Mythological Landscape Painting* (New Haven, 1944), 99, 116–35; Peters, *Landscape*, 93–95, fig. 79 note 343; von Blanckenhagen, "Daedalus," 110–37, fig. 2, pl. 33; idem, "Narration in Hellenistic and Roman Art," *AJA* 61 (1957), 78–83; R. Brilliant, *Visual Narratives* (Ithaca-London, 1984).

[27] Cities and other landscape elements seen from a bird's-eye view appear in landscape composition from antique times to the Renaissance, through medieval art. This method does play an important part in the main plane composition, but only as a motif to create depth of planes. Unlike the main plane, the bird's-eye view appears as a concept in earlier artistic expression, for instance, in Babylon, Egypt, and Thera. See Gisella Wataghin Cantino, "Veduta dall'alto e scena a volo d'uccello. Schemi compositivi dall'ellenismo alla Tarda Antichità," *RIASA*, n.s. 16 (1969), 30–107, with all previous literature; von Blanckenhagen, *Narrative*, 80–83.

[28] Panofsky, *Die Perspective*, 262–65, 290–301; White, *Development*, 58–60; Panofsky, *Renaissance*, 128–29; all with diagrams.

appropriate *circles*" (Panofsky's italics).[29] These "appropriate circles" may be similar to the "vision in a sphere" through which Roman painters composed their depth in landscapes, putting the protagonist in the center and the other planes round him.

It seems obvious to me that the origin of the concept of the main plane was in Roman landscape painting at the beginning of the first century. Later Roman and Early Christian artists followed this method of composition in single and multiple scene pictures. The wall mosaics in the nave of S. Maria Maggiore in Rome are a good example, from the middle of the fifth century. In the scenes of the Israelites' battle with the Amalekites there is only one episode (Fig. 10).[30] Moses, flanked by Aaron and Hur, is seen standing on a mountain with arms raised above the battling armies. Moses, the protagonist, is placed in the main plane in the top part of the panel, looking down at the armies in the lower part, which form the second plane although they are similar in size. The city to Moses' left is smaller in size and forms the third plane. The viewer is placed in the prominent position of Moses, the protagonist, from where the entire panel is seen. The episode of the spies from Jericho reporting to Joshua, in S. Maria Maggiore, depicts three separate scenes in the lower register of the mosaic panel (Fig. 11), although they are shown on a continuous surface to be viewed from left to right.[31] On the left are the two soldier-spies talking to Joshua in the main plane; to their right, as the second plane, is one of the spies leaving the city of Jericho. Smaller in size, in the third plane, the second spy is being lowered by a rope from Rahab's window in the wall. The sky and mountains are in the fourth plane, all seen from the point of view of Joshua, the protagonist, on the left.

The transmission of this compositional method from Early Christian Rome to Byzantium must have been direct. Indeed, the use of the main plane method in Constantinople and in the provinces can be well attested by examining sixth-century illuminated manuscripts, such as the Vi-

enna Genesis already referred to, as well as the Rossano and the Sinope Gospels.[32] This method was also followed in monumental paintings, such as the surviving mosaic apse of S. Appolinare in Classe near Ravenna[33] from 549, which is one of the most interesting examples of this method. The main plane method must have continued in use up to the period of iconoclasm, and possibly also during this period, as can be seen, for example, in the wall paintings of S. Maria Antiqua in Rome[34] and of S. Maria Foris Portas in Castelseprio,[35] as well as in the wall mosaics of the Great Mosque of Damascus in Syria.[36]

Of these three examples, the landscape paintings of Damascus may be of great help in elucidating the way in which the Roman concept of landscape painting developed into a formula. Made by Byzantine artists during the reign of the calif al-Walid I (705–715), they demonstrate the tradition of Byzantine main plane composition which has been lost to us through the iconoclasts' destruction in Constantinople. The planes of the large, essentially non-iconic mosaic are clearly distinguishable (Fig. 12).[37] The enormous trees flanking the composition, rising from the gushing waves of the Baradā River in the lower part, are the main plane. The deliberately smaller hippodrome or bridge

[29] Philostratus, *Eikones*, 1.4.2, Loeb (1931), trans. A. Fairbanks; Panofsky, *Renaissance*, 122, pointed out the mistake in his translation of κύκλοις as "receding planes" rather than a "circle."

[30] J. Wilpert, *Die römischen Mosaiken und Malereien der kirchlichen Bauten*, III (Freiburg im Breisgau, 1917), pl. 20. C. Cecchelli, *I mosaici della Basilica di S. Maria Maggiore* (Torino, 1956), 163, pl. xxxv.

[31] Wilpert, op. cit., pl. 24. Cecchelli, *I mosaici*, 176, 181, pl. xli.

[32] Rossano Cathedral, Purple Gospels; see A. Munoz, *Codex Purpureus Rossanensis* (Rome, 1907), pls. i-viii. Codex Sinopensis in Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Cod. Supp. gr. 1286; see A. Grabar, *Les peintures de l'Evangéliaire de Sinope* (Paris, 1948).

[33] See Pochat, *Figur und Landschaft*, 66, fig. 13; cf. H. P. L'Orange and P. J. Nordhagen, *Mosaics* (London, 1966), 12.

[34] J. Wilpert, *Die römischen Mosaiken und Malereien der kirchlichen Bauten*, IV (Freiburg im Breisgau, 1916), pls. 133–68, 192–201, 227, 228. See esp. pls. 165, 192–93.

[35] K. Weitzmann, *The Fresco Cycle of S. Maria di Castelseprio* (Princeton, 1951); see esp. Joseph's Dream, the Journey to Bethlehem, the Nativity, and the Adoration of the Magi, pls. iii–vi.

[36] R. Ettinghausen, *Arab Painting* (Geneva, 1977), 22–28.

[37] Part of the large panoramic landscape on the west wall of the portico of the mosque; see Ettinghausen, op. cit., 22–24. Marguerite Gautier-Van Berchem, "Mosaics of the Great Mosque of Umayyad Damascus," in K. A. C. Creswell, *Early Muslim Architecture, Umayyad. A.D. 622–750*, I.1 (Oxford, 1969), 324–72, pls. 40–62A. In her conclusions (367–72) Van Berchem discusses many monuments, such as the wall painting of Boscoreale and Early Christian mosaics and illuminated manuscripts up to the Paris Gregory and the Menologium of Basil II. She states (367): "The Syrian compositions, though preserving a large number of Greco-Roman motifs, are nevertheless quite free from this tradition in their general spirit and inspiration. . . . It must be admitted, however, that the Greco-Roman artists had a knowledge of the laws of perspective, and a capacity of spacing the different planes, of which the mosaicists of Al-Walid I were absolutely ignorant. . . . But it is only fair to say that mosaic, unlike fresco, does not lend itself to such treatment." Van Berchem, op. cit., 338–46, figs. 399–405, pls. 54b–58b.

surrounded by trees and buildings forms the sec-
ond plane, while the cluster of tiny edifices strewn
on top of the mountains, along the banks of the
river, and under the bridge are in the farthest
plane. These tiny buildings may rightly remind us
of the similar buildings of the penitent David and
Ezekiel's vision in the Paris Gregory, and the Job
miniature in the Leo Bible. Compared with these
Macedonian paintings, the small edifices may seem
to be more subtly placed in the Damascus mosaics,
but their method of positioning in the middle of
the main plane is the same.

In order to comprehend fully the specific use of
this stylistic method by the artists of the Macedo-
nian Renaissance, one final illuminated manu-
script, the Joshua Roll, must be mentioned.

The debates about the date and provenance of
the so-called Joshua Roll have not yet resolved the
problems of its disputed originality, and a discus-
sion of the compositional aspects of the Roll may
not settle them. It may, however, throw some light
on these problems from a different angle.[38] The
main plane method in the Joshua Roll is closer to
the more organic method of the Vienna Genesis,
of using small edifices as a device to separate the
scenes outside the main plane, rather than placing
them in the middle of the main plane, as in the
Paris Gregory, the Leo Bible, and the Paris Psalter.
Each scene in this continuous roll is depicted, as in
the Early Christian and Early Byzantine method,
with the different planes on a continuous surface.
The second plane rises behind the main plane
mostly in the form of a mountain or a building.
The third plane, consisting of tiny buildings and
small trees, is usually dispersed throughout the
composition between the top of the mountain on
the horizon and the lower ground level. A string
of scenes related to the Battle of Ai may serve as
example (Fig. 13).[39] In the first episode, on the left,
Joshua and his Israelite attendants are talking to
the two spies who have come from the city of Ai.[40]
They are in the main plane, and the mountain be-
hind them is in the second. The small edifice to the

lower right of the scene, a separating device called
a "voluted altar" by Kurt Weitzmann, may either
belong to the main plane or, as will be suggested
below, form the third plane.[41] The next scene de-
picts the Israelites going to attack the city of Ai.
The soldiers and the tree emerging from behind
the edifice to the left are in the main plane, while
the mountain ridge forms the second plane. The
small edifices with windows, to the right, are in the
third plane. In fact, the large trees on either side
of the scene play an important role in both scenes.
They emphasize the small size of the edifices in
front of them and stress the place of the latter in
the third plane.

The next scene, which is divided between sheets
VII and VIII, depicts the battle of Ai. The de-
feated Israelites on the left with their casualties,
the soldiers of Ai on the right, and the personifi-
cation of Ai are all in the main plane. This plane
also includes the large tree on the left and the re-
ceding columns of the Israelite horde with their
helmets and lances. The second plane is formed by
the mountain and the walled city of Ai. The small
building at the top right serves as the third plane
for this and the next scene to the right, where
Joshua and the elders prostrate themselves before
the hand of God to inquire about the defeat. The
mountain above them forms the second plane.
The small "voluted altar" edifice to the left, serving
as a separating device, can be regarded as being in
the main plane, if it is an altar, or is indicative of
the third plane, if it is a building. The partly visible
episode of the judgment of Achan, depicted on the
extreme right, continues the same method. The
seated Joshua and the soldiers to his left, as well as
Achan and the elders on the ensuing sheet, are in
the main plane; the mountain forms the second
plane, and the tiny trees on the horizon form the
third. Most of the Joshua Roll is, therefore, com-
posed in a pattern of waves. In the center of each
wave is the main plane, which is surrounded by
secondary planes. The mountains, trees, and
buildings overlapping the soldiers, who emerge
from behind them, prove how in a continuous
frieze one and the same plane or a separating de-
vice may serve as the main plane of one scene and
the second or third plane of another.

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[38] Vatican Library, Vat. Palat. Gr. 431. See K. Weitzmann, *The Joshua Roll* (Princeton, 1948); also a recent facsimile and an in-troductory volume summing up all the opinions and literature on the manuscript by O. Mazal (Graz, 1983).

[39] Vatican Library, Pal. Gr. 431, sheets VII–VIII. See *Il Rotulo di Giosuè* (Milan, 1905), pls. VII, VIII; Weitzmann, *Joshua Roll,* 17–19, figs. 22, 23; idem, *Illustrations in Roll and Codex* (Princeton, 1947), fig. 111.

[40] Weitzmann, *Joshua Roll,* 17–18, convincingly shows that these are the spies who returned from the city of Ai, and not those of Jericho. The main evidence is the bottom inscription which quotes Joshua 7:2–3 and not 6:25–26.

[41] See Weitzmann, *Joshua Roll,* chap. 4 dealing with "inserted motifs" as a separating device in a "continuous frieze." Weitz-mann (pp. 57–59) calls this edifice a cube and sees in it a degen-eration of an altar topped by a volute: "The Rotulus painter apparently gave little thought to the original meaning of the voluted altar . . ." (p. 58).

This kind of wavy composition with separating devices as the farthest plane may have been used in the prototype of S. Maria Maggiore and of the Vienna Genesis pictures before it became divided into either single scenes or multiple scenes in registers. Ultimately it may have originated in the methods of placing separating devices in consecutive episodes, as in the Roman Odyssean landscapes from the first century B.C., or in the history of the Dacian Wars illustrated on Trajan's Column from the second century A.D.[42]

At times in Roman art the use of the main plane indicates that the entire composition of a landscape painting is seen from within the picture, putting the viewer in the place of the large-scale protagonists in one plane, while all the subordinate, smaller-scale planes surround it. This concept survived throughout the Middle Ages, although different methods and techniques were used to implement it.

Indeed the main plane method is but one aspect of a multifaceted concept of composition that was used by artists during the Middle Ages. There are, of course, differences between each of the schools discussed. In one technique used by Roman artists the main plane was usually placed in the upper center part of the panel and surrounded by other planes, as in the Daedalus and Andromeda, the bucolic, and the harbor scenes. The Early Christians, whether in Rome or Constantinople, preserved the concept by placing the main plane in the center or on the right or left of the painting. The second plane, however, was placed either be-

low or to the side of the main plane when the composition was limited to one register. This is found in the mosaics of S. Maria Maggiore and in the Vienna Genesis (both of which have other, more complex compositions with two combined registers not dealt with here). Early Christian landscape paintings look very organic, mainly because the smaller, farthest planes, or former separating devices, are placed marginally and do not intrude into the scene in the main plane. The Joshua Roll adheres to this method in the fullest. Since it is a continuous scroll, it uses the separating devices as its main and farthest planes. But other Macedonian Renaissance manuscripts took these farthest planes out of the context of separating devices. The illusionistic artist of the Ezekiel Vision creates an organic, unified, multiscenic panel, with the planes scattered about, but he kept the farthest plane, in the form of a building, in the lower part of the miniature. The picture of the stricken Job has the farthest plane at the bottom, on a continuous surface. However, the more formal artist of the Penitent David placed the farthest plane, in the form of small buildings, within the main plane on a neutral ground, lacking landscape features.

All these miniatures adhere to the general taste of the Macedonian Renaissance, placing the farthest planes of the miniature at the sides or lower part of the composition. Different methods do, indeed, exist during the period; however, the essence of the main plane concept, of seeing the picture from the inside, survived throughout the Macedonian Renaissance, and continued to exist in later Byzantine art. In this way it entered the proto-Renaissance as part of the *maniera greca*, and even found its way into Michelangelo's Last Judgment in the Sistine Chapel.

The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

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[42] For the Odyssean landscapes see note 20 above. For Trajan's Column see K. Lehmann-Hartleben, *Die Trajanssäule* (Berlin, 1926); Weitzmann, *Roll and Codex*, 124–29; W. Gauer, *Untersuchungen zur Trajanssäule*, I (Berlin, 1977), esp. 22–24; R. Brilliant, *Visual Narratives*, 90–123; idem, *The Arch of Septimius Severus in the Roman Forum* (Rome, 1967), 219–50.